

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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### CROSS CURRENTS.

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#### CHAPTER XII.

SELMA'S departure produced in the Cornish household a mixed sensation combined in about equal parts of flatness and relief. It was certainly a blow, particularly to the younger members of the family, to have the heroine of the hour transported suddenly from their midst; but there had been an amount of uncertainty attending the simplest conversation with the said heroine which caused them to breathe more freely when she was out of the house, and to look forward to revelling with less restraint in the wedding preparations in her absence.

Roger, coming in that afternoon about half an hour after Selma had gone, took the news very quietly.

"It is much the best thing that could have happened for her, dear boy," said his mother, consolingly, as she "broke it to him," as Sylvia expressed it tragically, the coast having been left clear by the deeply sympathetic girls for the purpose. "She really has been wearing herself out, and I am very glad to think that she will be right away from it all for a few days. I told her that I was sure you would not think her unkind." Mrs. Cornish had not noticed that she had volunteered the opinion, unasked by Selma.

"I should never think her unkind," returned Roger, simply. "I want her to do just what is best for herself in every-

thing. I was afraid she wasn't well this morning, and I was afraid she would get knocked up if the thing went on." There was a ring of real relief and satisfaction in his voice, and his words were followed by an instant's pause before he went on with a hesitating, deprecating shyness which sat oddly on his frank, manly manner: "She went away in a great hurry, you say, mother? Is there—did she—is there any—message?"

Mrs. Cornish laughed.

"I shouldn't be surprised!" she said. "But I'm not secreting it! You'd better ask Helen—she saw her off."

But, in spite of his wistful looks towards the door, Helen was not forthcoming. She and Sylvia, with Mervyn Dallas, who was to dine and sleep at the Cornishes', her father having an engagement at his club, had retired to Helen's bedroom to inspect some of the trousseau frocks which had come home that day, and had not even been unpacked as yet, and to exchange ideas on the subject of trousseaux in general, and Selma's trousseau in particular, over the fire. Sylvia had to go reluctantly away at last, having her hands full of business in holiday time, and she departed with a final verdict on Selma's wedding-dress which was instantly controverted by Mervyn, as she sat on the fenderstool, gazing into space as intently as though the fate of nations hung in the balance.

"I don't agree with Sylvia at all," she said with the greatest earnestness. "I think silk is ever so much better than satin, don't you, Helen?"

Helen assented cordially, and began to fold up and dispose of some of the frocks recently under discussion; Mervyn, shifting her position a little, turned her brown eyes upon the fire, supporting her quaint

little chin upon her hand, and there was a short silence. Then she said in one of the funny little jerks so characteristic of her :

"Are you glad she has gone to Miss Tyrrell's, Helen?"

"Glad?" said Helen, with cheery inattention as she contemplated a garment presenting hideous complications to the folder. "Yes, very!"

"Don't you think she looks rather—ill?"

"She's so dreadfully excitable, poor child," returned Helen, briskly, as she was seized with a bright idea, and attacked her task energetically.

"You do think it's excitement, Helen?"

"Of course it is!"

Mervyn had spoken her last words anxiously, almost appealingly; but Helen was far too deeply involved with folds and trimmings to notice her tone of voice, and after another moment she said, half absently:

"Do you remember, Helen, when she said she wouldn't go to the first night of Mr. Tyrrell's new piece—the piece she would have played in you know? She was so—so odd."

Helen paused a moment as if to recall the occasion, and said:

"Why she was going to that dance with Roger, Mervyn. She was tremendously excited about it!"

"I know," assented the little, uneasy voice. "But she has been like that lots lately—I don't mean that I can say what it was, but somehow I feel—I feel as if—oh, Helen, you do think she's quite happy, don't you?"

Helen stopped short on her way across the room with the folded dress in her arm, and gazed at Mervyn with the blankest astonishment. The brown eyes were full of tears, and the anxious little voice was quivering, and the next instant Helen had crossed to her with a little laugh, and was turning Mervyn's face to her with a kind, careless touch on the rough, brown head.

"You ridiculous little thing," she said.

"What have you taken into your head? She's as happy as the day is long."

"Suppose—suppose she should be getting sorry to give up acting?"

"Suppose—suppose that she should elope with Jim or with Mr. Tyrrell instead of marrying Roger," said Helen, trying to imitate her tone, and failing lamentably, having no mimetic faculty whatever. "My dear child," she went on, as Mervyn smiled in spite of herself, "my dear child, I do

assure you that one is quite as likely as the other, and that either of the three is about as likely as that she will fly straight to the moon. Don't be a goose, Mervie," she concluded, with a hug. "Come and help me finish these things."

It never occurred to Helen to doubt that she herself, as Selma's sister, must know more about Selma than Selma's devoted slave could possibly do, and she spoke with all the consciousness of superior knowledge; and even had she doubted on this point, such an idea as that Selma should ever again long for her old work was, indeed, as absolutely inconceivable to her as that she should develop a pair of wings. Life was a very simple business in Helen's eyes, and the complications which people seemed to her to make for themselves by what she called "fancies," were both incomprehensible and reprehensible to her. Mervyn and her "idea" did not come within her sphere of conception at all, and she looked upon them, accordingly, with kindly, good-natured scorn. It was dinner-time before the "things" were finally disposed of; Selma's message for Humphrey did not seem to the practical and matter-of-fact Helen—even though she was in love herself—to demand immediate delivery, and she let him wait for it until he stopped her on her way out of the dining-room, and drew her rather shyly into the hall.

"Did she leave a message for me?"

Helen smiled at him, brightly.

"I don't know what you call a message," she said. "She certainly did not give me any news for you; but she was her own impulsive self over what she did say."

"What did she say, Helen?"

Helen answered him very softly.

"She told me to tell you that she loves you," she said; and with another sympathetic smile she turned in answer to a call from Nettie, and went into the drawing-room.

He did not follow her at once, nor did he go back to the dining-room. He wanted to conjure up for himself the tone in which the words had been spoken by Selma, and he betook himself for that purpose to the solitary smoking-room. But imagination was not his strongest point, and he soon passed into distant dreams of future bliss, amid material surroundings much more tangible than so illusive an article as a tone of voice.

There was no letter from Selma the next morning. She had written to him, every

day during his absence at Liverpool, long, girlish epistles, full of unrestrained devotion, to which he had responded at great length, and it was, as he expressed it to himself, rather a "pull-up" to find nothing for him in the pile of letters he turned over in such haste before any one else was down.

"What an ass I am! Of course she won't write when we are both in London," he told himself, though why she should not do so he did not define to himself. But when his family appeared gradually upon the scene, he found that every member of it, in his or her own fashion, took it for granted that he had had a letter from Selma, and while he was trying to reconcile their expectations with his previous conclusion, that "no one but an ass" would have expected her to write, the moment for mentioning that he had not heard slipped by, and somehow, after that, he felt an unaccountable reluctance to face the surprise they were bound to express in more or less derisive fashion if he said that she had not written. They had made such fun of the incessant correspondence between London and Liverpool.

There was no letter on the next morning, either, and it seemed to him still more impossible to mention the fact. None arrived during the day, and when the third morning found him still letterless, it occurred to him that Selma might be ill.

He said nothing of his fears; it would "look so rum," he told himself, perplexedly—being quite as unconscious as his family could have been of the motives which lay behind his silence—to announce suddenly that he had allowed them to believe he had heard every day when he had not; and after a low-spirited morning, spent in roaming about London, the simple and straightforward plan of calling at the Tyrrells' house and enquiring presented itself to him, as it would hardly have done to a more complex nature. He did not intend to go in; the element of awe and worship which, mingled with his love, held him back from, as he would have said, "bothering" her.

Such an apparently obvious and direct course of action having presented itself to him, he proceeded, as was natural to him, to carry his thought into immediate effect, and in half an hour's time he was standing on the Tyrrells' doorstep, receiving from the maid an assurance that Miss Malet was quite well.

"Miss Malet is in, sir," added the woman.

"Thanks, it doesn't matter," he said, hurriedly, feeling his unexpressed understanding with himself on the subject of going in losing its force in an alarming way. "I mean I won't come in. Quite well, you say?"

"Quite well, sir. What name shall I say?"

"Oh, you needn't say anything. It doesn't matter. I only wanted to know. Thanks."

He turned on his heel, and went rapidly away, feeling that another moment's temptation would be too much for him, and with a guilty fear, born of his sudden sense of temptation, that Selma might perhaps see him from the window and be "bothered" after all. That is to say he would have called the sensation a fear, though it would have been a delicate business to distinguish it, by the time he reached the top of the street, from a hope.

With the last post that night, at about nine o'clock, his letter came at last. The post was very late. He had given up all hopes for that evening, and he was playing chess with his father, very badly, when Jim, who had intercepted the parlour-maid, pranced into the room, holding both hands behind his back.

"I say, Roger, will you have it now, or wait till you get it?" he called, gleefully. "It's to-morrow morning's come in a hurry, I expect."

Roger had risen abruptly and involuntarily, and he laughed in the inexpressible gladness of his heart as he said:

"Give it up, old fellow."

"Two letters a day isn't fair play," chanted Jim, retreating with his prize; but he found himself seized, and incontinently bereft of it, as Roger said, with another laugh:

"Thanks, Jim. You can get out." And then he turned to his father, and went on, rather incoherently: "I beg your pardon, sir, shall we finish the game?"

"No, my boy," answered Mr. Cornish, rather drily. "On the whole, I think we needn't trouble. We'll try again—when you're married, perhaps."

There was a murmured apology for a moment or two, during which Roger seemed to be afflicted with an undefined desire which led him to wander vaguely about the room. Finally, he strayed in a

casual and aimless way out of the room, passing the open door of the smoking-room, which happened to be empty, and strayed in there. And once there, he opened his letter hastily enough, there being no one to see him, and prepared to devour its contents.

"Come and see me to-morrow afternoon."

"SELMA."

It contained only those seven words; and he had expected such an effusion as she had been in the habit of writing to him at Liverpool. His first feeling was that of a man who comes suddenly against a blank wall, where he has expected to find open country; but when the shock of surprise and disappointment was over, and the meaning of the words themselves grew upon him, his spirits rebounded, and he passed straightway into a seventh heaven of satisfaction. It was not in his nature to analyse the words, to perplex and torture himself by trying to read between the lines. Those seven simple, direct words conveyed to his mind three simple, direct facts—that he was to see Selma the next day; that she wanted to see him as he wanted to see her; that she loved him and trusted him so utterly that the simplest form of words was sufficient in her eyes between herself and him.

He had kept his disappointments and his fears as to Selma's health to himself; but his natural tendency was to perfect openness, and before very long all the family knew that he was to call at the Tyrrells' the next afternoon, he having mentioned the fact to Sylvia—in perhaps not quite such a casual manner as he imagined. But it was not until he and Humphrey were left alone together in the smoking-room that night, that the desire to impart to a fellow-creature the full extent of his beatitude overmastered him. He and Humphrey, half-brothers only, and with few tastes in common, were, nevertheless, strongly attached to one another. Their mutual affection, dating from Roger's early boyhood, had stood firm against twelve years' separation, and the two men looked upon one another to-day just as the two boys had looked upon one another twelve years before; they trusted, respected, and loved one another, oblivious of such superficial matters as diversity of tastes and difference in intellect, and they always liked to be together.

Roger had been smoking in silence for some time, with a radiant expression of countenance which had caused Humphrey

to glance at him more than once, when he said, suddenly:

"By Jove! I was blue this morning."

"What was wrong?" enquired Humphrey, with a slight change of expression, and another quick look at his brother.

"Well, to tell you the truth, old boy," said Roger, confidentially, "I hadn't heard from Selma for three days—not since she went away."

He paused a moment, apparently to refill his pipe, as a matter of fact because he wanted to see how Humphrey would receive the statement. Humphrey made no comment, however; the momentary suspension of his attention to his pipe was too slight to arrest his brother's attention, and Roger went on:

"Of course, I didn't want her to bother to write, but I got it into my head this morning that she might be ill, and I was jolly blue about it."

He laughed cheerily, and lifted the tumbler standing beside him to his lips.

"And you've heard this evening?"

"Yes, old man, I've heard this evening! And I feel, don't you know, as if a thirty-mile walk up hill was about my form to-night—as if I should like to roar a chorus or something of that sort?"

He laughed again, a ringing, boyish laugh, and Humphrey said, slowly:

"It was—a—long letter, then?"

"Well, no; not long! What does one want with words you know? That's the beauty of it! I feel as if she'd spoken to me. 'Come and see me to-morrow afternoon.'"

"Was that all?"

The words came from Humphrey sharply and abruptly, and Roger turned to him, pipe in hand, with another laugh.

"That was all—except—Selma. Takes your breath away at first, doesn't it?" he said; "only at first, though!"

"Only at first," repeated Humphrey, slowly and mechanically. "Of course—only—at first."

There was a long silence. It seemed to Roger that Humphrey might have found something else to say "without hurting himself," and he retired into himself to ruminate delightedly until he was roused by the words, "Does she always write like that?"

Humphrey's pipe had gone out, and he had been leaning forward staring at the fire, apparently thinking deeply and undecidedly. He leant back in his chair,



crossing his legs, as he spoke, and, to a finer ear than Roger's, the excessive carelessness of his tone would have seemed a little unreal. But Roger noticed nothing, though he wished, without knowing why, that Humphrey had not asked the question.

"No," he said, rather slowly, "no, she writes — no, she doesn't. But that's nothing to do with it?"

If the last words were more than half query Humphrey made no reply to them. He looked at his brother and moved as though he meant to speak, and then his intention apparently faded, and he rose and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"Good-night, old fellow," he said. "It's getting late."

Roger did not follow him. He sat on in the smoking-room, thinking. The colour seemed suddenly to have gone out of everything; he was vaguely uneasy and disturbed, and he went to his room an hour later dreading he could not say what.

But the impression had no hold upon him the next morning, and when he went into the morning-room about three o'clock to ask, according to order, for a note his mother wished him to take to Selma, he was, in his own estimation, the happiest man on earth. He took the note, and, as he was going out of the room, Sylvia called him back.

"Look," she said, "do you know what this is? It's the wedding-veil. Isn't it beautiful?"

He took the delicate lace fabric between his strong fingers and held it up curiously.

"The veil," he repeated. "It makes that appalling ceremony seem dreadfully real, Sylvia! The veil!" He paused a moment, and laid it down with awkward gentleness. "It isn't half so beautiful as the head," he said, and departed hastily.

There was no one in the Tyrrells' drawing-room when he was shown in. The fire was low, and threw out no glow, and in the general dimness the artistic furniture, and the elaborately unconventional arrangement of the room, struck Roger as being depressing. But he had only an instant in which to consider his surroundings. Almost before the servant could have had time to announce him the door opened with a quick, nervous turn of the handle, and Selma came swiftly into the room.

"My darling!" he cried. "My darling!"

At the first sound of his voice she came to a sudden standstill, shaken from head to foot by a short, sharp shiver, and as he advanced to take her in his arms, her lips parted in a little, hoarse, hardly audible cry.

"The fire," she said, "it's—it's going out," and passing him, hurriedly, she fell on her knees on the hearth-rug, grasping one of the fire-place hangings as she put the embers together with a hand that trembled as if with terrible cold.

Roger stood still in the middle of the room, with a bewildered sense of having been repulsed. What did it matter how many fires went out, he asked himself, when they had not seen one another for four days? He turned towards her, hesitating, wondering, and hurt; and then he told himself that he was a fool, and that she would kiss him in a moment, and he went up to her again, and said, cheerily:

"I've been waiting four days, Selma. Mightn't the fire wait a minute?"

She rose then, slowly, holding to the hangings with clinging, grasping hands, as though to regain from the sense of material stability the mental grip which had so suddenly failed her. He could not see her face, it was bent over the fire, and something in her attitude startled him even more than her extraordinary silence. He put his hand suddenly and entreatingly on her arm; even then his old feeling of worship for her held him instinctively, and he dared not take her unconsenting in his arms.

"Selma," he said, "Selma, what is it?"

She let her face fall forward against the high mantelpiece, and seemed to be almost fighting for breath, as though the rapid beating of her heart were choking her; and then, as he spoke her name again with a sharp ring of deadly fear in his voice, she lifted herself up, and turned her face to him at last. As he saw it he fell back a step, with an inarticulate exclamation of dismay; it was perfectly white, even to the very lips, and her eyes were dark and sunken, with heavy blue shadows round them.

"I—I have something to say to you," she began, speaking hurriedly, and almost thickly. "Don't touch me, and don't—don't look at me, Roger." Her voice broke pathetically, and she stopped a moment.

He turned his face—almost as white as hers under the sunburn—mechanically towards the fire, and she went on :

"Roger—I—there's nothing will make me less dreadful, I know. I've got to tell you. Oh, why didn't I write it! Why didn't I write it! Roger, I've made a mistake!"

"A mistake," he echoed, vaguely, and as he lifted his troubled eyes to hers, she covered her face with both her hands. "We must put it right together then, Selma."

"We must put it right!" she cried, wildly. "Yes, we must put it right while there's time! But not together, Roger! Oh, Roger, not together!"

"Selma, tell me straight out. What do you mean?"

"I mean that we had better never have seen each other! I mean that you've cared about a girl who isn't worth caring for at all, who wasn't anything but a fickle child who—forgot! Roger, forget all about me, and fall in love with a nice girl, not like me. I—I've made a dreadful mistake. I've got to work, to work all my life, and I can't be your wife, Roger—I mustn't be any one's wife, ever!"

She had spoken through sobs and blinding tears, seeing the simple, manly face before her change under her words as under a series of heavy blows, forcing herself on to the end in a sort of fury of compulsion, and as she finished she let her face fall upon her hands again in an agony of tears.

One minute passed, two, three, and still the only sound in the room was the sound of her crying. Then Roger moistened his white lips for the third time, and said, in a low, bewildered voice :

"If you said I wasn't good enough for you, I should—understand. I can't understand this. You've got to work? Why? Selma, I should work for you all my life. Selma, do you think I shouldn't make you happy?"

She lifted her head, suddenly, facing him with a glow of enthusiasm dawning for the first time in her dark eyes—the feverish, delusive enthusiasm of an oversensitive nature over-wrought.

"It isn't happiness," she cried, and the light in her eyes grew brighter, and her voice more fervid with every word she uttered. "It isn't happiness one must think of! It's what one must do! Oh, don't you see, don't you see! I hadn't any real love to give when I thought I fell

in love with you! I'd given it all away—my heart, and my life, and everything—to my art, and I can never get them back—never. If—if I married you, Roger, I should always know that I had—deserted. There would always be something in my heart that would be more to me than you. I should be miserable—that wouldn't matter—but you would know it. I couldn't always keep it down, and I should spoil your life, too!"

"Spoil it, then!" he cried, passionately, coming a step nearer, and catching her hands in his. "It's yours, Selma! Do as you like with it, only don't go out of it, don't go away from me!"

But she drew herself out of his hands, and the glow in her eyes seemed to light up her white face, and absolutely to transfigure it.

With every word she had spoken, overstrained and worked up as she had been when she began, she had apparently transported herself further into a region of exaggerated, exalted self-devotion—the self-devotion of blind, fanatic youth—in which no sacrifice seemed too hard, no suffering too severe; her voice, as she answered him, rang with a passionate intensity of enthusiasm and conviction, which made it, as it made her face, beautiful as it had never been before.

"I must!" she said. "I must!"

He looked at her for a moment—looked at her with a dreadful, uncomprehending agony in his honest blue eyes—and then everything seemed suddenly to swim round with him, and he grasped at a chair for support. He was vaguely conscious that she was begging him to forgive her, to forget her; and then he pulled himself together as, in his simple creed, a man should under a blow, even if it crushed him to the earth as it fell.

"There isn't anything to forgive," he said, hoarsely, and with long pauses between the words. "I always knew you were—too good for me."

He stood another moment, leaning heavily on the chair, and then turned and went across the room, with heavy, stumbling steps, down the stairs, and out of the house.

The front door shut with a heavy thud, and as she heard it, standing motionless, just as he had left her, a little strangled cry broke from Selma's parted lips. She lifted both hands to her head, as though something there was strained almost beyond endurance. Then she, too, moved

slowly and went away, dragging herself to her own room, to drop still and exhausted on her bed.

The dreary twilight crept into the empty room, the short, December day was ended, and darkness fell.

## THE SURREY SIDE.

### BANKSIDE TO BERMONDSEY.

AT right angles with the Borough High Street, and behind the great block of railway arches about London Bridge Station, runs Saint Thomas's Street, which takes its name from the old hospital of Saint Thomas, now removed to the river embankment on the south side of Westminster Bridge. The little dingy church of Saint Thomas has been spared, and some handsome, old-fashioned houses, once part of the hospital buildings, now used as railway offices. But on the other side of the way opens the quadrangle of Guy's Hospital, perhaps the noblest institution of the kind in the world.

In the morning before the work of the day has fairly begun, the hospital presents its most cheerful aspect. With the stir of life and expectation, weariness and pain are less felt, and hope attends the physician's morning round. The night-nurses are relieved from their long vigil, and here and there is one who is inhaling a breath of the morning air; a breeze fresh from the Surrey hills is rustling in the tree-tops. Pleasant to tired eyes are the glimpses of green lawns and trees in the freshest robe of spring. Pigeons flutter about the sober, brick court-yards. A pretty nurse in white cap and apron pauses and watches them smilingly as they strut and swagger and sun themselves. And what trays of loaves are coming in for breakfast! A patient at Guy's is surely a privileged being, rather a guest of a grand old foundation, than merely case so-and-so. And should he or she be afflicted with strange or abnormal symptoms—the patient is the subject of interest and attention that is really flattering to the feelings.

Then you reflect that all this beneficent machinery is due to the initiative of a plain business man, a little miserly in his ways, perhaps, but to such good purpose, that happy would be the world were misers of his stamp plentiful.

The column of working men and women

who will presently be marching on, as out-patients to the gates of the hospital, are directed by placards to present themselves by way of Great Maze Pond, and the name excites a little curiosity. Antiquarians say that this name commemorates the former existence of a maze, which formed part of the grounds of the handsome town lodging of the Abbot of Battle, whose dwelling was upon the river bank. Others say that the maze belonged to a house of the Princess Mary Tudor. Whether the Princess charged "twopence for the maze," as is done at Hampton Court, does not appear on the record. At present the neighbourhood would hardly tempt a princess there to take up her abode. But there are pleasant nooks, too, about the hospital. Here is a little old-fashioned street with small houses not without a certain dignity about them, and with windows and steps for brightness and cleanness quite a pattern to the locality, which does not excel in those qualities. And from the door of the narrow-panelled hall of No. 999 issues a young man, bare-headed, save for a great shock of almost flaxen hair, with a great book under his arm; great, but battered and earmarked, such as "Materia Medica" ought to be by a diligent student. And away he goes with great strides towards the hospital; but not without a fervid greeting to the pretty maid who is cleaning the steps lower down, and who doesn't want to listen to his rubbish—but who listens and laughs, nevertheless. The lint white locks, the whiffs of smoke from the big pipe, seem to hang in the air, and attract the sunshine. Other youths equally unconcerned are taking hasty flight towards the hospital.

Out of the maze one comes upon a street, which is only the ghost of a street after all—a dead and buried street, a mere hollow brick archway, with a busy world above it, a world of trains, starting, arriving, and standing still, of booking-offices, resounding passages, and vaulted glassy roofs, filled with a perpetual steam. The street knows nothing of all this; day and night is all the same to it, always with its gas lamps burning, and a kind of darkness visibly hanging about it. Deep subterranean vaults sometimes give issue or entrance to some iron-bound lorry, with great powerful horses, which makes clatter and rumbling enough to wake the seven sleepers; but it has no effect upon Western Street, for its name is posted up there, like a sepulchral inscription. One may journey

a long way in a kind of underground world, busy enough in its dim twilight, with huge waggons and horses, and sacks of meal and malt, with fragrant hop-pockets, and stores of wholesome grain. Passing under the dry arch of London Bridge, there is Bankside, with its memories of the old play-houses and players. Between the Bear Garden—which still bears the same name—and the brewery of Barclay and Perkins, there were four of these summer theatres; the Bear Garden, itself sometimes called the Hope—Excellent Hope, though wild beasts and gladiators did most possess it—the Swan came next, “fallen to decay like a dying swan;” and then the Rose, a name for sweetness; and the famous Globe, “the glory of the Bank,” according to Ben Jonson, who witnessed its destruction by fire on the twenty-ninth of June, 1613—

Which, though it were the fort of the whole parish,  
Flank'd with a ditch and forc'd out of a marish,  
I saw with two poor chambers taken in,  
And raz'd ere thought could urge—this might have  
been.

But our way lies in the other direction, where is Tooley Street, crowded with heavy vans, and almost blocked with traffic. The name is a corruption of Saint Olave's Street, and there is Saint Olave's church, where a church has been since the days of Canute. The existing church is, however, eighteenth-century classic, with curious round windows, which peer like so many eyes into the bustling street. If there are any tailors left in Tooley Street to represent the important three of the days of the “Anti-Jacobin,” they don't live at this end, where are great warehouses, which front to important wharves on the river, with a constant turmoil and traffic, with tubs, and casks, and bales of all kinds, and the rattle of steam-cranes and other convincing evidences of the importance of the port of Southwark. Here are egg merchants, and fruit merchants, and potato merchants in active communication with carrier-steamers from the great European ports, discharging cargoes with furious haste, and steaming off by the next tide for fresh supplies. In all this life and movement of the present, who can recall the vision of those old times when the Abbot of Battle dwelt here in quiet seclusion? Yet this Hayes Wharf, whose tall buildings shut out all view of the river, is the very site of the Abbot's dwelling. Mill Lane, which is the next opening, represents Battle

Bridge, a bridge that crossed a small rivulet that emptied itself into the Thames. And Battle Bridge Stairs are still in existence as a testimony that such things were somewhere among this labyrinth of wharves and offices.

A little farther on an opening presents itself, called Stoney Lane, supposed to be the way to the old Roman ferry; a dismal-looking lane, with the ruins of burnt buildings about it, and still not a glimpse of the river, although we know that it flows on the other side of those tall warehouses. But here is Pickle Herring Street, a narrow pass between huge buildings, and here, in a sort of slit between two immense masses of brick-work, we find Pickle Herring Stairs—

On Southwark's coast an ancient port appears,  
To market folks well known, called Herring Stairs.

Well known and frequented in other days, perhaps, but at this present as lonely and deserted a spot as any in London; just a place to be murdered in and thrown into the seething tide with not a soul the wiser. The tide is up, and plashing against the slimy stairs—three or four steps, and then a plunge into the whirl of waters. But Pickle Herring Wharf is close at hand, a really fine opening, if you can avoid the casks, and bales, and the huge bundles of hides that are swinging about in all directions. From no other point can you have a nobler view of London on the Thames; the bridge, the Monument, Wren's beautiful spires, Saint Magnus the lofty, the aerial buttresses of Saint Dunstan's, the mass of wharves and buildings from which other spires rise, with the broad façade of the Custom House, and the bastions and battlements of the Tower, its ancient story written on the dark and weathered stones. And with these, you can see the river in its imperial flow, and the movement everywhere of ships and barges; all the lower part of the river is wrapped in a dubious haze, through which show the huge piers and girders of the new Tower Bridge, which is advancing towards completion at a not too rapid pace.

Two dockers, who are taking breath after a spell of hard work, turn their eyes in the same direction, and seem to be simultaneously struck with a certain sense of doubt as to the prospects of the new bridge.

“Us'll be lucky that lives to walk across her. What say you, Chippy?”

For his part, Chippy would like nothing



better than to be provided with free rations of beer till that consummation came to pass. He would seek no further favours at the hand of Fortune. These sentiments, delivered with some emphasis, and garnished with sundry flowers of speech, did not seem to imply any animosity to the new bridge, which, to the ordinary observer, seems to be doing fairly well in the way of progress. Anyhow, the dry arch is finished—a handsome one of granite; and one has the satisfaction of walking under the new Tower Bridge, and may wait with patience for the chance which seemed so enigmatically doubtful to the dockers.

Pickle Herring Street becomes Shad Thames without any distinctive change, except, perhaps, that the footways are narrower, and the roadway is more crowded with vans and heavy waggons. Smart shipping-clerks slip in and out among the wheels grinding against the granite kerbs, and under the horses' heads, whose iron heels are striking forth sparks from the paving-stones; great bales, and sacks, and casks whirl up and down, and frequent little red flags stuck in doorways intimate danger of some kind ahead or aloft. At intervals one comes to an open wharf, whence are to be seen glimpses of the opposite shore, of big steamers wallowing about in the tide, of barges in clusters hanging about the wharves.

Horsley Down suggests the wild heath and open country, but it is just a nest of buildings like the last. And Courage's Brewery, where the congestion of traffic is increased, with big draymen, and huge horses, and drays piled with casks, to say nothing of the firemen in attendance—for there has been something of a flare-up in the neighbourhood, and the fire-hose have flooded the street—Courage's Brewery, it is said, is the site of the old mansion of the Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem. The church of Saint John is hard by, and proves to be the owner of that curious composition in the way of a spire, consisting of a tall Corinthian column perched upon a kind of dwarf-tower, which is such a conspicuous object from the railway after leaving London Bridge. It is supposed that Shad Thames is a contraction of Saint John at Thames. But the Pickled Herring and the Shad—which is also good pickled—seem to have a natural and proper affinity to each other, which it is a pity to disturb by any such conjectures.

Anyhow, Shad Thames is full of the movement of a solid, substantial trade, with wharves along the river, and great piles of warehouses on either hand, connected overhead with flying wooden bridges; with great corn-mills, and rice-mills exuding white dust from every pore, and tremulous with the whirl of the ponderous mill-stones. With a graceful curve, Shad Thames leads us still among wharves and warehouses to an opening called Dockhead—a place where carmen wait for jobs, and where you can call a waggon and pair of horses, a tilted van, or a great iron-bound lorry, with the same facility as you can a cab in Piccadilly. The dock, of which the head forms this rendezvous of heavy traffic, is called Saint Saviour's, and forms part of the boundary of Southwark. Beyond is Bermondsey, a dim, indefinite region, furrowed with old water-courses, and with the pits of tanners and hide and skin dressers.

This Beormund's Eye, or Island, was once noted for its rich abbey, often the retreat of royal and noble personages. But the abbey has left not a vestige, and is only kept in memory by the name of Abbey Street. After the monks came Protestant refugees, chiefly from Normandy, who had practised the tanning of skins and the dressing of leather time out of mind in and about their old, walled towns on the Norman rivers. We owe the foundation of the English Monarchy, it will be remembered, to the grandson of a tanner of Falaise; and possibly some of his legitimate descendants may have established their pits in Bermondsey when the great Louis drove them from their native seats. Some of these old water-courses still exist, daily filled by the tide, and at other times sweltering in mud.

Beyond, there is Rotherhithe, or Redriff, as it used to be called—a great resort of seamen in the Elizabethan age, and even now not unacquainted with seafaring men, although it is perhaps more in the building and timber trade, and meddles not with shipping, except in the way of barges and hoys. According to recent philologists, the place is the Rytherhythe, or cattle-wharf—a name curiously corresponding with the Lambhythe, or Lambeth, at the other side of the peninsula. It was said that traces of the canal made by Canute—when he besieged London, and took his galleys above the bridge and city by means of an artificial cut—were abundantly evident in the seventeenth century. But the

channel was probably an ancient bed of the river, which the Danish King may have utilised according to the tradition.

It was at Redriff, it may be remembered, that Captain Lemuel Gulliver had his abode, till he was driven away "by the concourse of curious people," who came to question him as to his adventures. But now, what with the river in front, and the Commercial docks at the back, Rotherhithe is as secluded as can be desired. And when the tide is up, and the draw-bridges admit vessels to the docks, it is often cut off altogether from the rest of the world, except by way of the great highway of the Thames.

Beyond Rotherhithe there is no more Surrey-side; for then Kent comes in, and the coast begins, which by river and sea forms the most attractive feature of a voyage down stream and channel.

#### ON BRITISH ECCENTRICITY.

It is hard for an Englishman to say whether his own countrymen are really more eccentric than other people. He is told they are; but how is he to know that the information may not be built solidly upon prejudice? The saying, "Oh, he's an Englishman," with the shrug of the shoulders that means so much, is often, indeed, commonly put forward abroad when there is talk of the doings of this or that man, whose ways are not like the ways of the herd of mankind. Some Englishmen don't appreciate this sort of thing. They get in a rage with the foreigner who charges them with being of an eccentric race. But, for my part, I always take it as a compliment, bow, and express my obligations, and assure the speaker that I trust he does not intentionally flatter me and the countrymen of whom I am so proud.

On the other hand, however, every one, who has been even but for a few months among the people of the Continent, cannot help coming to the conclusion that we English folk have not the monopoly of eccentricity. What of those palaces and buildings—the outcome of a brain charged with fancy, like the tales of the Arabian Nights—which stupefy us in Bavaria, the work, indeed, of a monarch who was hardly more than half-witted? What, too, of the mechanical tricks of construction which in divers Italian villas astonish the visitor who has

not been forewarned of them? He goes guilelessly upon a certain terrace, for example, where snowy statues seem like to charm his eye, and whence he expects to be able to look forth in romantic peace upon the gardens and orange-groves, and the blue sea beneath and beyond him. Suddenly, however, the statues move, flourish their arms, a cross-fire of cascades from the fountains takes him upon both cheeks, and the balustrade walks away! It is like a bit of "Alice in Wonderland" somewhat modified. What, too, of the crypts in the Capuchin church of Rome and elsewhere in the south, wherein you see the dead bodies of the monks who died ten or twenty years ago standing, dried and ugly, dressed in their brown robes with rosaries pendent from their waists, keeping guard, as it were, over the arabesques of bones with which the walls and ceilings of these dismal vaults are decorated? You are shown the skeleton of a nobleman nailed against the plaster among the other bones, and your guide does not seem to think there is much eccentricity in this form of art.

To turn for a moment to a still stronger form of eccentricity: what of the doings of the Communists only a score of years ago? We odd islanders may be queer, unintelligible fellows; but it would, I hope, take a good deal to make us do such deeds as our French neighbours—under stress of pique, rage, and blind vanity—had no shame in doing.

The truth is, that it is impossible to compare nations as if they were individuals. Each nation has, so to speak, grown up in an atmosphere of its own. When the time of which Mr. Bellamy writes in "Looking Backwards," has actually come, it will be different. Then, I suppose, we shall all be on the same plane, speaking the same language, whether we are in Yorkshire or Patagonia, Chicago or Corea, and shall all be understood everywhere. But it seems improbable that this convenient state of affairs will come about in our day, or even in that of our grandchildren of the tenth generation yet to live. So, for the present, we must recognise the peculiarities of other people as necessary features of them, and by no means as characteristics meant to excite laughter in the rest of the world. When first I travelled abroad I was much amused by the way the common German eats with his knife. But habit and a measure of experience have toned down

these feelings, until they hardly exist in me. And, nowadays, I am as much at home with the long-haired woodman of a Sardinian forest, in his grimy little hut, as in my own English den among my books and pictures.

Of course I do not mean to imply that it is well for a man to become comparatively indifferent to his own nation. Travel has that effect upon some people, especially when for a term of years they reside abroad, and notably in southern Italy. It eats away their patriotism. They call themselves by that long name—cosmopolitan. They are not, they say, citizens of any one town or country in particular, but of the world at large. This sounds very fine; but if you come to analyse their notions you will, I am afraid, generally discover that, so far from having got their sympathies enlarged to such a degree that they can feel for the central African negro in his degradation, as much as they can feel for the Whitechapel toiler in his semi-starvation, they have rather lost all sympathy for every one except for themselves.

"Cosmopolitan" is, in numbers of instances, only "selfish" writ large.

But to recur to my subject at the outset. It was suggested to me by a visit the other day to Welbeck Abbey, which, as all the world of reading Englishmen knows, is the country seat in Nottinghamshire of the Duke of Portland.

The eccentric features of Welbeck are due to the late Duke. He spent between two and three millions sterling in excavating tunnels under his gardens and parkland, in lighting these tunnels with glazed shafts and gas-fittings, and also in building subterranean rooms, which are not unnaturally called the wonders of Welbeck.

He must have been crazy, not merely eccentric, you will say. But no; that he was not. There is a bust of him in the picture gallery—one of the underground rooms, a hundred and sixty feet long by sixty-four in width—and no man could desire a more cultured and noble head than this of the late Duke. It was a whim, founded, it may be, on personal and physical causes. For years hundreds of workmen were employed on these curious labours. His Grace was much at the mercy of contractors; and even at his death his designs were by no means completed. And the result of this costly burrowing is, that when you visit the Abbey, instead of walking or riding for a

mile or two through some of the finest woodland in England, you suddenly plunge into a tunnel, and have to make the same distance in half darkness, with brick walls on either hand, and brick vaulting some eight or ten feet overhead. It is not a fair exchange for the sunlight, the foliage, and the bird music in the open; but it has the effect of making one very conscious of the eccentricity of at least one Englishman of this century.

It reminds one of Flaubert's advice to young Guy de Maupassant, when this now famous Frenchman was a novice in the field of literature: "You must, my friend, be original. If you have it not in you, you must acquire originality." For seven years Maupassant took his manuscripts to Flaubert, and received them back. At the end of the time he had, it appeared, acquired enough originality to fit himself for an exhibition to the world.

And yet it is just the French, more than any other people, who assume to taunt us Englishmen for our originality! We must, in future, recast our estimate of this taunt. It is rather a veiled sort of envy, I am disposed to think.

But it is in the conduct of Englishwomen that some fancy our British eccentricity is most markedly shown. How our sisters in ulsters and short skirts are stared at on the Continent! The air with which the distinguished foreign lady looks them over through her long-handled eye-glass is nothing less than delightful. She seems to be thanking Heaven she is not as they are. And yet it often happens that a little later she is fain to confess, with a sigh, that if only her own bringing-up had been half as generous and free as that of the English damsel, she would be a better and happier woman than she is.

It would be hard to find a more typical example of the wayward, strong-natured, and imperious Englishwoman than Lady Hester Stanhope, the niece of William Pitt. She was her uncle's constant companion during the various crises of his government; and it was to her that, after Austerlitz, when he lay on his death-bed, and despair for the western world in its efforts against Bonaparte the conqueror filled his soul, he cried, with that historic cry: "Roll up the map of Europe!"

Well, Pitt died; and Lady Hester's vocation of politician was gone. She went to the East, and there in Palestine she soon gained the veneration, almost, indeed, the worship, of the people. They held

her for a prophethess; and she did not bring the word into disrepute. When Kinglake paid her a visit in the Lebanon, she was sixty years old, with a face "of the most astonishing whiteness." Further, "she wore a very large turban, made seemingly of pale Cashmere shawls, and so disposed as to conceal the hair; her dress, from the chin down to the point at which it was concealed by the drapery on her lap, was a mass of white linen, loosely folding;" and her legs were in loose Eastern trousers. She ruled the villagers on her estate as despotically as a Pasha, and even in old age showed the same strength of will which in her youth had made her famous as a breaker of unruly horses in her natal district of Somersetshire.

I myself am privileged to know a lady who bears many points of resemblance to this Lady Hester. In her younger days she made long riding tours in North Africa, and about the less-frequented countries of Europe. During the wars for Italian independence she was to all intents and purposes one of Garibaldi's staff. She nursed Garibaldi after his Aspromonte wound, was arrested by the Bourbon police, and imprisoned in a Sicilian jail. And so her career went on until she also, like Lady Hester, retired to the East for the declining years of her life. There, in a Turkish island, she lives alone in a villa she has built after her own plan. But though age has dulled her physical powers, she is still so active of mind that the Turkish officials fear her more than half-a-dozen ordinary European diplomatists. She is honest and resolute. When she sees an abuse, she denounces it, and in no half-hearted manner. And here, in this remote island of the Levant, she has astonished the natives by establishing a hospital for sick mules, and horses, and donkeys, which hospital she maintains at her own exclusive cost. In no way has she so adequately proved her eccentricity—so the islanders think—as in this ridiculous regard of hers for the race of burden-bearing quadrupeds. Not so long ago, in her zeal for the protection of animals, she procured for the chief functionary of her island the position of local president of the society which has done so much to ameliorate the condition of suffering horses. The document was sent to her from the Continent, with the name of the notable gentleman inscribed upon it; and with the document was a large silver medal for his honour. But when this

large-hearted lady formally asked him to accept the reputable office, and presented the document and medal, he repulsed them both. He would have nothing to do with such an absurd business.

Once upon a time I, too, came under the banner of British eccentrics. I paid a visit to Crete, another Turkish island by the Levant, and, not finding the hotel of the capital to my mind, with the aid of some kindly intermediaries, I hired a house in the country, and went thither to take up my abode alone. To make matters worse, it was at an epoch when the island was disturbed by revolt. The Turkish regiments were being increased by new levies, and great was the activity on the various military exercising grounds outside Canea and Candia, the two chief towns.

However, nothing serious came of it, and I am free to confess that I enjoyed my unconventional bivouac none the less for the flavour of excitement that this outbreak in the island lent to it.

"How original! Just like an Englishman!" remarked one of the officers of the Austrian ironclads at that time anchored with the international fleet in Suda Bay. Yet, I believe, as a matter of fact, that he and some of his brethren envied me my residence.

It is entertaining to listen to the observations of foreigners upon our national game of football. Here it seems as if our character was objectively epitomised. For a mere piece of leather to risk broken necks, heads, and limbs in so reckless a manner! And yet if herein one does not discover a very direct descendant of the chivalrous craze of the Middle Ages, I doubt if any such descendant may still be said to exist. Our forefathers, several centuries back, do not, to us, seem very wise in their habit of going about fighting with each other on behalf of the black or the blue eyes of their lady-loves. But they did it with the same zest, and probably got as much satisfaction out of it, as our modern fellow-countrymen in the honour of winning their game.

The Briton who has been in Norway or Denmark, and mixed with the Norwegians at home, cannot for the life of him sympathise with the Scandinavian custom of shaking hands violently with one's fellow guests at dinner, and uttering the words "Thanks for meat," when the meal is ended. It seems a most futile and ridiculous proceeding. Well and good, if



the interchange of courtesies were confined to each guest severally, and his host. But that every individual should engage in a methodical bout of hand-shaking with every one else seems absurd in the extreme. Yet our Scandinavian friends do not feel themselves under any compulsion to justify this long-established custom.

Each man and each nation — within certain bounds—to his and its own taste. On one side of the sea you may be a Royal Highness, and on the other merely Citizen So-and-so. In one town, if you do as your fellow-men do, you will lift your hat when you enter a shop or a café; in another, you will cock it braggartly over your ear, and when you sit down you will lift your legs on to the mantelpiece, and look around with an air of defiance.

The medicine-man of the Choctaws is doubtless a very great personage among the Indians of his own tribe; but if he appeared in Fleet Street, perfumed and bedecked according to his ideas of full dress, he would meet with more laughter than homage.

I suppose most people could point to men or women of their acquaintance whom they hold in regard as originals or eccentrics. It is somewhat dubious a title for respect, even with us who are reckoned so eccentric a nation. And yet it is worth while to remember that all the great inventions which have done so much for civilisation have been discovered by eccentrics; that is, by men who stepped out of the common groove, men who differed more or less from other men in their habits and ideals.

If we were all cast in the same mould, with characters, aspirations, talents, and features just alike, it might be convenient in some ways. We should at least then be spared the efforts we nowadays have to make to understand the immediate nature and purposes of our fellow men. But, dear me, what a sadly dull place the world would be! It does not need much thought to bring one to the conclusion that, in many respects, the originals or eccentrics of mankind are like leaven to the rest of the world.

In truth, there is more of compliment than abuse in the term "an original" applied to a man or woman. But there must, of course, be a certain amount of ability at the back of the originality. Otherwise the person who is original is like to be dubbed a lunatic by the more undiscerning of his friends, and, if he is

rich, perhaps transported against his will into a sequestered, though licensed, mad-house.

## A VERY PECULIAR CASE.

### A COMPLETE STORY.

LIKE many people in this world who, in apparent health and in the full possession of all their faculties, have yet, unknown to themselves or anybody else, the germs of some dire disease lurking within them, I was totally ignorant that there was anything the matter with me. I had never been ill since boyhood, consequently had never consulted a doctor. Whether, if I had, he would have discovered my malady before I did, I know not; but it is doubtful, seeing that it certainly must be a wholly unusual if not unique case, at any rate in the way I found it out for myself. This phase of it alone appears so peculiar and incredible that I conceive it must have opened a new field for speculation amongst the pathologists, psychologists, or whatever the special ologists are who study these matters.

At the time it happened—thirty years ago—I was a bachelor living in a drawing-room communicating by folding-doors with the bedroom behind it, not a hundred miles from the Regent Circus. None of the furniture was my own save one or two easy-chairs, a writing-table, and a rather shabby, dilapidated old bureau or *escritoire*—a relic of my great-grandfather's, I believe, and preserved by me as representing pretty nearly all the property I ever inherited. It stood in the darkest corner of the sitting-room, though near one of two long French windows. I seldom went to it, using its numerous drawers, pigeon-holes, etc., only as receptacles for old receipts, bills, papers, and a few odd accumulations of no value, which, for some reasons, I did not wish to destroy. The key to its circular top I had, with reprehensible carelessness in such matters, mislaid for weeks. This gave me no concern. I could look for it when I wanted it—that was enough. Other lodgers were in the house, which was kept by a retired butler and his wife, who, with three servants, attended on the inmates.

A young man's life in London, without his being the least unsteady, frequently involves him in late hours when he has a large circle of acquaintances. It was so

with me, especially during one particular season. Operas, theatres, suppers, and dances crowded so thick and fast upon each other that, for nights together, I never had more than three or four hours in bed—always having to be up early. Then, by degrees, when I could turn in in reasonable time, I could not sleep, and, on this account, even the thought of a long night in bed gradually became a terror to me. The fact is, my nervous system was becoming thoroughly unstrung, though at the time I did not know what that meant; certainly I never thought of it as an illness, and, equally certainly, should have scouted any idea of seeking advice about it. I know better now; but let me not anticipate, only, it should be added, that I periodically had some very voluminous and important private correspondence to attend to. By that perversity which frequently seems to regulate these affairs, this often fell out when I was most busy in the day, and when dinners and parties were most numerous in the evening. Never choosing to sacrifice pleasure for business, but always striving to combine the two, I would go at my letters when I came home, however late or tired, if not sleepy. Then, to screw myself up to the work, I would tie a wet towel round my head, stick a pipe in my mouth, and brew myself a cup of strong tea. Thus I often wrote far into the night. As a matter of course, after a bout of this kind, I never went to sleep at all. I rose unrefreshed, fevered, nervous, irritable. A cup of tea and a slice of toast were substituted for the hearty breakfast of yore. I could not eat until luncheon; only towards evening did I feel at all myself, and so late hours became habitual.

In addition, another thing was worrying me greatly. For the past month or more I felt convinced I was being robbed. I did not possess much jewellery, but I was constantly missing certain little trinkets and small articles. Amongst others, a silver match-box, a large 'crocodile-leather, gold-mounted cigar-case, a pair of gold sleeve-links, a small locket containing some of my mother's and father's hair, a set of studs, a pearl breast-pin, and the like. Also a pocket letter or card-case, which I well knew contained two one-pound Scotch bank-notes—unusual money, not easily forgotten. I felt sure that with every allowance for careless habits, these and many another similar object had vanished in the most unaccountable way.

Search high and low as I would, they were not to be found anywhere in my rooms.

I had lived there nearly two years when this vexation began, and I knew not whom to suspect. It was horribly awkward, and most unpleasant. The landlord and his wife bore unimpeachable characters, and I could never have looked either of them in the face again had I breathed the faintest suspicion of their honesty. Three other men, two of whom I knew slightly, were lodging in the house, as I have said, but as to suspecting them of this petty larceny, the idea was out of the question. No, it must be one of the servants. But which? One of the three was a lad of sixteen. He was a new-comer, truly. The two women were in the house when I took up my quarters there—respectable "elderly parties."

I did not know what to do for the best. To lock up the rooms was impossible, and even to do the same with all my drawers, writing-table, wardrobe, etc., now, after never having previously turned a key on anything, would be at once to cast a slur on the establishment. Besides, I never could tell exactly when I missed this or that article, because, as I repeat, my careless ways had often led me to imagine that I had lost a thing, when I had merely mislaid it.

Presently the idea occurred to me that I would set a trap. I left a small sovereign purse in a corner drawer of the dressing-table, whence I could declare many trinkets and valuables had been purloined; but there it remained. I shifted it, partially covered it with other things, as if by accident, or as if it had been forgotten. Yet it was always forthcoming whenever I looked. I put a solitary sovereign on a corner of the mantelpiece; the housemaid twice drew my attention to the fact that the coin was still lying there. No, nothing that I ever placed as a bait disappeared. The depredations were confined to such objects as I hadn't been thinking about until I wanted them.

I hesitated, as I have said, to tell my landlord, so I now determined to consult Scotland Yard, for, during the sleepless nights, which as the London season waned grew longer, this subject assumed far greater importance than it did in the day. It became an intolerable nightmare; and I would sometimes get out of bed and search for any object I might suddenly remember I had not seen for a long while.

Sometimes I found it, sometimes I did not; sometimes I never set eyes on it again—it was clean gone. Indeed, at last, it was in this way, and at these untimely hours, that I discovered most of my losses. Thus, what with them and my sleeplessness, I grew quite dejected; but I entirely refused to think myself ill. It absolutely never occurred to me; so I walked down to Scotland Yard and confided my troubles to an Inspector in what is now called the "Criminal Investigation Department." This resulted one Sunday morning in my entertaining at breakfast a certain gentleman named Bunter. An odd-looking person, who had a strange propensity for speering and prying about, and appeared to take a great fancy to the house. It was just the sort of place he wanted.

On this pretext I introduced him to the landlord, with a view possibly of making it worth that individual's while to hand him over the lease. In this way he managed to go all over the establishment, and converse with everybody living in it—everybody except the gentleman who occupied the top storey—the one person I did not know. My friend from Scotland Yard was particularly inquisitive about him since he could not see him, and when I told him that his habits were irregular, coming home very late, and occasionally not going out at all for days, the official looked very grave, finally winked at me, and said he would call again shortly.

But he never had occasion to do so, for it was during the night following the visit of this distinguished guest that I discovered who was the thief, and arrived at the secret of the whole mystery.

The month was August; the nights hot and sultry, and less than ever conducive to sleep. I had nothing to do that evening, and although I turned in early it was with the usual result. The clocks had just struck one, and I had been in bed since eleven without closing my eyes. It was the old story; I was accustomed to it. Suddenly, amidst the host of perplexing and often awe-inspiring thoughts whirling through one's brain under these conditions, I remembered that pocket letter-case containing the two one-pound Scotch bank-notes. Where was it? I had not seen it for weeks! After restlessly striving to drive away the desire to get up and search for it, it mastered me, and out of bed I sprang. For fully an hour I carried on

the quest, but all in vain. Every conceivable and inconceivable corner, drawer, and pocket were ransacked. The key of the escritoire had been mislaid, so I could not examine that; but I knew it contained little else but papers.

At length, entirely exhausted, irritated, and fevered, and with the chamber-candle expiring with a splutter, I flung myself on a couch in the drawing-room. Dawn had not yet broken; but in a few minutes, as I lay there coiled up in my dressing-gown, I unexpectedly fell asleep—a restless, dreaming sleep, full of fantastic, weird-like, indescribable shapes.

When I awoke it was daylight, though the room was still shadowy and obscure, save in one spot close to the long window, where the venetian blind was partially raised—the window nearest that dark corner occupied by the old escritoire. The head of the couch was towards the mantelpiece, but almost facing the door from the landing on the further side of the wall.

At the moment I opened my eyes with a feeling of relief at having just escaped some visionary peril, to my amazement I saw that door slowly open, and the figure of a man stealthily entering by it. It did not make the faintest sound on its hinges, nor did he with his footstep—not so much as the creaking of a plank. The light in that part of the room was far too dim to allow of my seeing what he was like. His face was slightly averted also, and except that the general look of the man seemed to be not altogether unfamiliar, I could not in the least tell who it was. The first impulse, of course, was to sit up and call out, but for some inexplicable reason I restrained it; perhaps because the thought instantly crossed my mind that here was the thief, and upon that I suppose I rapidly concluded to watch him, and pretend to be still sleeping.

However this may be, I did not move as I observed him creep noiselessly across the room to the end of the mantelpiece furthest from that where I was lying. He appeared not to notice me, and after feeling with his hand for a moment between the edge of the looking-glass and the wall by the mantelshelf, he took something away, and instantly crossed back to the window by the escritoire. He passed the little gap of light so quickly into the dark corner that I still failed to recognise him. Then I could dimly make

out that he was apparently unlocking the lumbering piece of old furniture, though still without making the slightest sound.

"Ho! ho!" thought I, "my fine fellow, now I've caught you, have I? You have found the key, and are going to exercise your calling in that direction, eh? Well, there's not much that is worth your attention there; you won't find that a profitable hunting-ground!"

I was not long, you may depend, in coming to a determination. While he was still fumbling at the *escritoire*, I rose, and stealing softly up behind him, suddenly seized him by the back of his collar. He endeavoured to wriggle out of my grasp, but I turned him round so quickly that we both staggered, and fell on the floor in a huddled heap together—he undermost! In the fall I struck my forehead severely against something, probably a projecting chair. For the moment the blow seemed to blind me; but as we had rolled over into the gap of light from the window, I had caught sight of his face, turned up as it was towards mine, and I saw—whose face, think you? Why, no other than my own—yes, my very own, as I well knew it in the looking-glass!

That one instant of amazement and consternation in which, as by a flash, I made this recognition, was followed by a total oblivion of all surroundings. The face and figure seemed to fade away beneath me, and to vanish with my consciousness.

How long I lay prostrate, face downwards on the floor, I know not; but in that position I found myself when my bewildered senses slowly returned. For a while, of course, I could remember nothing—how I came there or what had brought me to such a pass. Only very slowly did the circumstances recall themselves. What on earth did they mean? My forehead was unmistakably cut and still bleeding; indeed, there was a patch of congealed blood on the carpet plainly visible in the broad flood of early sunlight now streaming in beneath the half-raised blind. Had I been dreaming? More likely I had had a fit; anyhow, I was so utterly bewildered that it was some time before my thoughts became coherent. Then, alarmed, and fully conscious for the first time in my life that I must be seriously ill or labouring under some mysterious mental aberration, I rose from the floor and sat down in an adjacent chair.

As my eyes wandered vacantly around, they fell upon the circular top of the old *escritoire*. It was partially open. Some one had been at it, then; that was clear! That was no dream, no fancy—scarcely due to a fit, one would think—at least, not of the sort I had tremblingly thought of. Yes, and there was the missing key in the lock. When these facts had fully broken in upon my be-cobwebbed brain, they led to but one idea. Acting on it, I pushed the lid full open, and with the rapidity of thought pulled out one drawer after another, and there, in most of them, were deposited a lot of the articles and objects I had so long missed—there, in this neglected, useless piece of old furniture! I turned them all out in a confusion worse confounded than my thoughts. But there they were—almost every one: cigar-case, silver match-box, trinkets, locket, and pocket-book containing the Scotch bank-notes.

Then how on earth had they come to be in this place? A thief would hardly have stolen them to conceal them thus in my own apartments, unless—unless—and then, very reluctantly, slowly, and at first but vaguely, did I arrive at the conclusion—unless the thief was myself!

Verily this was an alarming supposition, and confirmed my worst dread. I must be suffering under some frightful, inexplicable brain disease, for that I had done this thing I was wholly and totally unconscious.

For days and days, however, I took no action. I hesitated to breathe a word of the extraordinary affair to a soul. Who would believe it? Everybody would say I had gone out of my mind—I thought so myself. I doubted if any doctor would accept as veracious this wild account of my dread awakening to the truth. Yet, as I knew it to be the truth, I set this record of it down while it was all fresh in my memory, and eventually, being unable any longer to bear the horrible suspense and perplexity in which the strange experience had left me, I put it before a medical friend.

To my unspeakable astonishment, he believed every word of it. Then, after answering his endless searching questions, and when he had listened to such verbal additions to the narrative as I could give him, he did not doubt one single point.

"Yes," he said, "amongst other complications, you probably have been walking in



your sleep, and yourself secreting the various articles from time to time. The key, to wit, of the *escritoire*, which you imagine to have been the object taken from behind the looking-glass by the figure you fancy you saw, had been placed there by your own hand. Your brain retained some dim perception of your having done so, and the disordered condition of your nervous system accounts for that perception assuming the shape of a figure resembling yourself, and in a state of partial unconsciousness you dashed upon your imaginary burglar—your own ghost, in fact—fell, and fully restored your senses to their equilibrium by that rap on your head. However, it is enough for you if I tell you that your nervous system is wholly broken down, and that if you don't take a long holiday, go into the country, and for the next two or three months lead a perfectly regular, quiet life, I won't answer for the consequences. No, I shall give you very little medicine—fresh air, quiet, and regularity are the only drugs you stand in need of."

His advice was followed to the letter, for I was thoroughly frightened. Thirty years have passed; I have been long married, and I have never missed a single piece of property, large or small, since that extraordinary August night.

## A GARRISON ROMANCE.

By MRS. LEITH ADAMS (MRS. LAFFAN).

Author of "*Louis Draycott*," "*Geoffrey Stirling*," "*Aunt Hepsey's Foundling*," etc.

### CHAPTER VIII.

#### THE MAJOR'S SHIP COMES IN.

THE swift curtain of the dusk had fallen across the sea like a grey veil, studded with stars. The moon, with soft and silvery light, had peered through the grey, and rode high in the heaven, making night fairer than the fairest day, before the plash of oars was heard once more, and the grating of a boat's keel on the pebbly shore.

Major Clutterbuck—after showing that he was himself fully capable of taking plenty of "scope"—was returning to the bosom of his family. He might, indeed, have been likened to an elderly sort of dove returning to its ark, for he certainly brought with him an olive-branch—using the word

as a metaphor to express a general atmosphere of peace and joy. His wife and Mabel met him on the doorstep, while, in the background, the "scramble"—Phil, in his night-gown, and holding on to Bertie on one hand, and the bannisters on the other—came swarming down the stairs.

"Why did you go out without telling us, Desbrow? I have been so anxious!" said Mrs. Clutterbuck, unwise as loving woman, alas! so often is.

It seemed as though, so to speak, some of the radiance died out of the Major.

"Now, Marion," he said, with an aggrieved and injured air, "why will you check me in this way—before the servants, too!"

This last was an allusion to Joseppina, whose head was hanging over the rail of the third storey, like an apple over a wall, and whose ivory teeth were displayed in a sympathetic smile. The women-servants of a household always sympathise with the master of it, even when he is clearly in the wrong.

"I really felt so much better, so much lighter of heart, for the little—the little . . . change—I am sure I was humming a tune as I came across, and now, it is all dashed—dashed and blighted—by being met with a reproach—it is, indeed. That domineering spirit of yours, my dear, is really very painful to me at times—"

He sat down languidly in a chair in the hall, as though he really could not stand up under the burden of his wife's imperiousness.

Jim, Algie, and little Phil crowded about his knee, but Bertie slipped his hand into his mother's.

"I say," said Jim, "we're glad you're well again, you know. It's bad when you can't sing for us—and tell us about Giant Grim—"

"Tell 'bout Diant Dim," echoed Algie; and Phil, not to be behindhand, put up his hand to his father's face, and touched it lovingly.

"Phil, he's welly glad yoo be's besser, poor—pappy—"

The Major looked at his wife with reproachful eyes over the children's heads.

"See," that look seemed to say, "how these little ones appreciate me—no reproaches from them, no blighting of the warm, fresh impulses of my nature, no efforts to belittle me in the presence of our servitors."

And all the while Mrs. Clutterbuck was

trembling with anxiety and eagerness—and the flush that stole to her pallid cheek told of a heart that beat hot and fast.

Nothing escaped Mabel.

"We were both anxious, papa," she said; "and no wonder—considering how ill you have been, and how you gave us the slip in such a shabby sort of way. Come, you must have some soup at once. Joseppina, take these naughty boys to bed."

Phil sat down flat on the matting by way of protest, and Algie made himself into an octopus, and clasped determined arms about his sister Mabel; but both the rebels were finally overcome, and delivered over to Joseppina, King Baby kissing his hand condescendingly to his subjects as he disappeared up the wide, stone stairway in his nurse's arms. Bertie and Jim looked on with the calm superiority of the spectators in a street row. They could sit up for an hour yet; and who could say what delightful possibilities an extra hour of "pap's" society might not hold?

Jim was big with the secret confided to his keeping. He had not breathed a word of it yet to any living soul, though his little mind was much exercised as to the changes which might come about presently. Would they all—namely, the "scramble"—go and live with Captain Rowan in that funny place Ricasoli, where the rooms were so small and low, and Joseppina said the ghost of a soldier, who was shot there a long time ago, walked about at nights with eyes that shone like lamps, and a white-bosomed shirt with a crimson hole in the breast where the bullets went in? That was not a nice idea at all, and Jim was afraid Phil would be frightened all the time.

For himself he was not a bit afraid of ghosts; indeed, would rather like to see one—if he had a good big table to get under the while, and could peep out from under the table-cloth.

But Ricasoli might be out of the question, and mother and "pap" would be lonesome without anybody. Perhaps Captain Rowan would come and live with them at Sleima; in which case Jim would make him bowl to him every evening in the field behind the house, while he batted. Some day—pap said when his ship came in—they might go to a big school; and one Cousin Gilbert had told them you were "nowhere" at a big school if you couldn't "handle a bat."

Jim wouldn't like to be "nowhere." He

had been used to being very much "on the spot," and there could be no manner of doubt that Algie was rebellious about bowling; he was also unreasonable—he wanted to bat himself sometimes. Jim had tried once to make Phil bowl instead. But the matter did not turn out a success, for King Baby bowled himself over first ball, and fell on his nose, and Joseppina was cross. Bertie was the best to bowl, he never grumbled; but then Mabel and Lily often wanted Bertie. There could be no doubt, taking all these things into consideration, that Captain Rowan would be most useful if he became a member of the household. The turmoil of all these thoughts in Jim's mind resulted in him making the most excruciating faces whenever he caught Mabel's eye, shaking his head, and pursing up his lips as tight as if they were like mother's work-bag, and drew with a string.

"What is the matter with the boy?" said the Major, when the family had adjourned to the sitting-room, and Jim was going through these manoeuvres.

"I was only looking at Mabel," said Jim, much crestfallen.

"Looking at Mabel," retorted his father, sharply; "do you call those horrible grimaces looking at Mabel? My dear"—turning to his wife—"you are right; these children have too much scope. They must be sent to school—they really must."

"Who's going to pay for us?" said Jim, making a small Colossus of Rhodes of himself, and standing, all bold and unabashed, right in front of the Major.

"Who's going to pay for you? Why, I am, of course," replied that potentate, with a lofty air.

"Is the—the ship come in, father?" said Bertie.

He had often looked for it through the telescope at the turret window; he had often wondered if it ever would come in; and now, perhaps it had glided by without him being there to see it.

"Yes, my boy, I fancy the turn of fortune has come at last; the ship 'laden with golden grain' has reached its haven. Shall pap sing you a song? Well, then, listen:

"Merrily danced the Quaker's wife,  
And merrily danced the Qua—ker."

But at this stage of the song Jim went into one of his ecstasies, and lay down on the floor to roll it out.

"That's Mothie," he shrieked. "Mothie's

the Quaker's wife. I'd love to see her dance. She'd dance lovely."

"Mothie" did not look like dancing. Her face was white and drawn; her eyes burned as she gazed fixedly at her husband. Mabel, coming in with a cup of soup on a little tray, looked intently from the one to the other, then caught her breath a little as she set the tray down.

In a trice, like a flash, she had gathered something of the state of affairs.

"Jim, get up," she said, in the quiet tone which was never disobeyed by any child of the household; "get up, and go and get your supper—you and Bertie together—and then go quietly to bed."

With a last writhe of his lithe body, a last portentous wink, Jim disappeared. Bertie kissed his mother long and closely, as if he felt, he knew not why, that she stood in need of comfort and sympathy. Then he stopped a moment opposite his father.

"Papa," he said, "I am glad your ship has come in. I have watched for it very often. We must buy mamma a fine silk gown, and a gold serpent with eyes full of light, like the one that Mrs. Lindsay wears, and oh! a hundred things besides, mustn't we, dear papa? Papa, I am glad."

"Thank you, my boy," said the Major, with the air of a victorious general receiving the acclamations of a populace, "thank you. Yes, mamma shall 'walk in silk attire, and siller ha' to spare.'"

This last item would assuredly be a new condition of affairs in the Clutterbuck household; and the grim humour of the remark was not lost upon the utterer of it, as any one might have known by the twinkle of his eye.

At last, the three were alone together; at last the mother and daughter might look for some explanation of this blinding effulgence of satisfaction, which seemed to radiate from the Major's entire being.

"Marion," he began, "I shall want lights in my study to-night. I shall want to be undisturbed."

"Surely, Desbrow," came the reply, "you are not going to have any one in this evening? You are not fit for company, indeed you are not, dear. As it is, I don't feel at all sure you will not suffer for this sudden exertion."

"I really should have thought, my dear, that by this time you would have known how perfectly useless interference in my affairs is. Permit me to retain the use of my own judgement, and to act upon it.

Because a man is married I do not see why he should be supposed to lose his own individuality."

"Desbrow, indeed I did not mean——"

But Mabel broke in here:

"Of course, papa knows quite well, dearest, that it is only your anxiety, your dear, loving anxiety for him, that makes you so careful over him."

"Quite, quite," said the Major; then he waved the whole female sex, as it were, gracefully aside: "quite so; women are weak creatures at the best. They let their fears lead them astray. They worry you to death, and then excuse themselves by saying how fond they are of you."

"Desbrow, I never mean to worry you."

"No, no, you never mean to do anything, I know. However, rest assured I am not going to entertain the garrison this evening; I am going to be occupied entirely with business details of a most absorbing nature. I shall in all probability sit late on into the night. You forget that to-morrow is mail-day."

He rose and sauntered towards the now widely-opened window, leaning his arms on the ledge, and looking musingly out into the silver-flooded sea.

"Begone dull care,  
I prithee begone from me-e-e."

How tunelessly the notes floated out into the stillness and beauty of the night! Truly the Major had a light heart of his own.

Suddenly he turned into the room again, placed himself leisurely in a low lounge—venerable as to years, but comfortable beyond expression—placed his elbows on the arms of the chair, and fitted the fingertips of either hand exactly one to the other.

Mabel was now taking her turn at the window, the sea, and the moonlight, a little fitful smile touching her lips and setting them a-quiver.

A woman's heart sings like a bird as she thinks of the man she loves; its voice is tremulous with passion as she thinks how the man loves her. She is quite contented to listen to this song in solitude and silence. She asks no more of life than the continuance of a melody that ravishes her ear with its sweetness. With Marguerite, Mabel could have stretched out her arms to the silver sea, and cried: "To-morrow, to-morrow will come, and bring my love to me."

She had but to wait, and the rolling hours would bring the boon she craved. The love of these two was still a thing so young, that it held much of youth's restlessness and impatience; therefore would time lag, until sight, and touch, and hearing should again be satisfied and fulfilled. Their love was a secret as yet—from all but little Jim—therefore, the more cherished. Even to give such a secret words to those who have the best right to hear, takes away somewhat from the sense of sacred individual possession. Like a bud folded close, all its perfume is garnered in its heart, and has as yet been given to no wind of heaven to waft hither and thither at will.

"It is our own, we cannot keep it always so; but this will always be a dear, dear time to look back upon—a time when no one in all the wide, wide world knew about it except Jim; and Jim—why, Jim counts for nothing."

Thus pondering, it was strange how Charley's voice and look, nay, even the very touch of his hand, came back to Mabel Graham as living realities—things almost tangible, painted on the thin air in such vivid colours as made them seem pictures cunning as Nature itself.

Far off in the radiance, where the moon kissed the sea, was a dark speck that moved. Coming up out of the still shining, rose the croon and cry of the Maltese love-song—the song that, once heard, we never forget through all the years. It is simple—it has but two episodes—it can only be described in the words of one of the world's sweetest singers—it is "a song of love and longing," love passionate and ideal, longing unspeakable. Mabel listened intently—leaning through the open casement—to the music that spoke for her own full heart. In between the verses she could catch the faint tinkle of a zither, repeating the refrain. . . .

"Ahimé . . . . Ahimé . . . M'a-mie!"

Yet some sort of subtle revolt arose in her at the sadness of the boatman's song. On such a night surely some glad triumphant melody would better suit the hour?

Then a voice broke in her musings.

"My little girl, come here to me; I have some wonderful news to tell. . . ."

Thus the Major, in his most winning manner—a manner, let it be said once for all, which was no joke; a manner which was irresistible to those who loved him and

believed in him. This is a way some men have with their womenkind. If they said: "Come here, my dears, and be killed"; then would those women kneel meekly in a row, with their back hair down, and—metaphorically—have their heads cut off. It is not the best men who are loved in this fashion. This is not encouraging for the best men; but it is true for all that, and has, to my mind, a pathetic side to it. I call to mind a man who led his wife and four daughters such a life as it makes one shudder to think of. He died—of a cruel and lingering disease. People looked at you straight in the face, and said: "His family are inconsolable . . . such grief was never seen. . . ." They looked you as if daring you to express surprise, even by a glance, or a raised eyebrow. And what could you say? Again I call to mind a man, who—through all the long years stunted and blighted a woman's life, crippled her sensibilities, slighted and insulted her at every turn; and when he died, she said, her lips, white with watching, quivering as she spoke; "I shall never get over it: my heart is buried in his grave—"; then, with a long, quivering sigh, "He had such a way with him—when he liked. . . ."

There lay the secret of the whole matter. He had "such a way" with him; the little addenda, "when he liked," was significant of much, but did not take away from the main fact.

Well, Major Desbrow Clutterbuck was one of the men who had "a way with him," thereby holding his womenkind in abject subjugation.

When he spoke in that caressing tone, when he said, "My dear wife," or "My little girl," they forgot all the hard words that had gone before. A grand transformation-scene took place, of which the central figure was the glorified Major, and the attendant sprites his entire family.

His "little girl," adjured to come and listen to wonderful and startling news, left her place at the open window, and placed herself dutifully beside his knee.

"Dear mamma," he said, still in the same caressing voice, "you must hear this too," and he held out his hand, as Ahasuerus may have extended the golden sceptre to Esther.

The three thus grouped might well have been taken as a picture of the family union which is declared to be strength. The stately father in the centre; the faded, yet still pretty mother; the fair and gentle



girl at the father's knee. What more would you?

The Major drew Mabel's yielding form nearer to him; touched her brow with his lips ever so gently.

"You have always been our blessing, my pet," he said, at length, in a voice slightly tremulous with emotion of some sort, "has she not, Marion?"

"I have tried to be," said Mabel, feeling a little guilty, if truth must be told, because of that secret still locked within her own breast—and Jim's.

Mrs. Clutterbuck made no reply at all; only her hands clenched on the arm of her chair, and she watched her husband's face with a strained intentness.

"What our boys would have done without you, Mabel—as I said to Mr. Jones a while ago—I am sure I do not know."

"Mr. Jones!" said Mabel, opening her brown eyes wide. "Mr. Jones—papa—what has he to do with it?"

A less astute man than the Major would have given a sharp look at the two women to see how they stood this first thrust of the knife.

But he gazed steadily and a little dreamily out at the fair night sky, seen in all its purple, jewelled beauty from where he sat.

"What has he to do with it? Ah, my dear, there lies my secret—my glad and happy secret. Mr. Jones has to do with all and everything concerning us—most of all with everything concerning you, dear Mabel—most of all with everything concerning you."

"Desbrow," broke out his wife at this, and her voice sounded like a cry for pity, "Desbrow, you have not——"

He turned a look of reproachful surprise upon her white, appealing face.

"Of course I have not, my dear. I have not actually taken Mabel's name in vain, and finally accepted our good friend's noble and generous offer. Do you know me so little—you, Marion, of all the world—as to believe me capable of so little delicacy of feeling? Do you imagine I could so little respect the exquisite bloom of maidenly reserve?"

But Mrs. Clutterbuck was unmelted. Her voice had a hard ring—quite a metallic sound, indeed—and her eyes burned in their sunken sockets.

"What have you said, Desbrow? What have you done?"

"What have I said? Why, told Mr.

Jones that he has my warmest good wishes in his suit. Told him that nothing would give me greater happiness than to see him my dear and respected, highly respected, son-in-law. What have I done? Arranged for him to be here to-morrow, at six p.m., to plead for himself with the lady—permit me to say, the happy and honoured lady—of his choice."

Honoured she might be; happy she scarcely looked, with those pallid, hard-set lips, those agonising eyes, full of mingled fear and pain like those of some beautiful, hunted animal driven to bay.

She had drawn back from her father's touch. Still kneeling, she leant back against her mother's knees, looking up at him.

So might some innocent creature look up at the butcher who holds the knife ready for the slaughter.

When she spoke even the cool Major gave a little start.

Could that be Mabel's voice?

"And you told—Mr. Jones—you thought it likely I should accept this—offer of his?"

"I told Mr. Jones that I was practically sure you would accept this offer of his—practically sure you would act as becomes my daughter. I said that the deep sense of gratitude I was convinced you would feel towards the man who not only—under Providence—saved the life of your little brother, but who—also under Providence—has proved himself the saviour, the benefactor of your father, of your family——"

"I knew it, Desbrow. Desbrow, I knew it was coming to that," cried Mrs. Clutterbuck, throwing herself back in her chair, and wringing her hands.

"My love," said the Major, "be calm. Do not let this sudden and unexpected joy overcome you. Believe me, my dear Marion, I fully enter into your feelings of relief, and—er—of delight in this sudden turn of fortune's wheel; but moderate your feelings, my dear, you will suffer for it afterwards if you do not. See how calmly I take it all—I, who am the person most concerned."

There could be no reason to reproach Mabel with a want of calmness. She had risen from her humble and caressing attitude. She stood a little distance off, her hands, tightly linked, falling against her white gown, her head held high, her eyes—oh, what would that dear lover of hers have said if he could have seen the look in her eyes just then!

"You mean to say, papa, that Mr. Jones has helped you to what you call 'tide over a bad place,' that he has paid, or is willing to pay for you, these liabilities which have made you so unhappy and so ill?"

"Admirably put," said the Major, caressing his moustache thoughtfully; "admirably put. My dear girl, you have stated the case exactly—so far."

"So far," she echoed, in that passionless, even voice that in moments of supreme suffering kind Nature sometimes gives us to masquerade with, "so far—yes, I know it is only 'so far,' and now will you tell me how far—how much further, I should say—things have gone? I think I understand that this"—and she held out her white, capable hand to the flood of the moonlight that streamed through the window—"this is the price to be paid on our side."

"Do you know, Mabel," said the Major, with gentle reproach, "it has just occurred to me as possible that you can be a trifle—only the merest trifle, but still, just a trifle—coarse?"

She did not wince; she was past that. There comes to all of us a stage in which a little more, or a little less, pain makes no matter. Those who, in the good old mediæval days, that so many regret and long to see restored, tortured their fellow-creatures for conscience' sake, knew this truth well, and noting that numbness supervened, put off any more experiments until another day.

If it were going to be shown to be right that she should give up Charley Rowan—he, the sweetness of whose love she had but just tasted—then what did all minor pangs matter?

"I do not mean to be—coarse," she said, speaking wholly without resentment; "I only want to know the whole truth—to set things straight and plain before me, that I may look them in the face. Tell me, did you—did you say to Mr. Jones that you thought it likely I could—love him?"

"No, no, not exactly that. I said that I was firmly convinced that gratitude, that a sense of—well—er—of the fitness of things, a realisation of the honour done you by a man who offers to settle three thousand a year—three thousand a year!—upon you the day you become his wife; who offers to assist your father in any possible way that is suggested to him; to give the boys—those dear lads of ours—a

solid chance in life, such as Winchester, Oxford—all the highest educational privileges youth can know. I say that a man who offers all these things out of love, pure, heartfelt love, for a girl without a penny to her name, is deserving of some consideration, some respect."

Mabel drew a long, shuddering breath.

"He is," she said; "he is indeed."

"That's my noble girl," said the Major, enraptured; "I knew you would fall into my view of the case; I knew you would feel that never again could you look into the innocent eyes of those sweet children with serenity, if you defrauded them—I use the word deliberately and calmly—defrauded them of their one chance in life. As to myself"—here the Major, as it were, cast himself aside like a husk—"I am a very secondary consideration in the matter. I feel that. Still, to have my peace of mind restored, to owe it to my dear and dutiful daughter; to see your mother, your dear and patient mother, restored to that position in society she is so much fitted to adorn; to look with humid eyes upon all these things, and to say, 'We owe it all to Mabel—all to that sweet girl, who won a good man's heart, and opened his—his—'" he was very nearly saying "purse," but caught himself up in time, and substituted "hand"—"opened his hand, so that her family rose up and called her blessed;" that would indeed be a proud moment in the life of Desbrow Clutterbuck."

"You have made up your mind, then, papa, to take—you have perhaps already taken—this money from Mr. Jones?"

"I will not use the word 'taken.' I will amend that phrase, my dear, with your permission. I will say 'accepted the loan' of a few paltry thousands—I am speaking, you will understand, of Mr. Jones's view of the sums advanced—to relieve my temporary embarrassments. Understand, my dear Mabel, that I absolutely refuse to look upon these embarrassments as otherwise than temporary. I have every hope that the speculation which, in the interests of my family, I have entered into, and which have not turned out as I could wish—very far, indeed, from what I could wish—will right themselves in time, and repay me fourfold into my own—" he was going to say "bosom"; but again corrected himself, and substituted "pocket," the word rejected before—"into my own pocket. As I explained to Mr. Jones when I

showed him this evening the papers relating to these mines, we must succeed in the end. But, of course, the question is, when will that end be? As I still further told him, I have never been a man to think only of my own interests; I never forget for a moment that I am a family man. I look at my children, uneducated, save for your admirable and well-meant efforts; I see your mother by no means attired in the manner she ought to be, and I say to myself, 'Desbrow Clutterbuck, it behoves you to make some effort—for others; things are not as they should be; very far from it. Try to mend them.' I have tried in various ways; but my efforts have not been blessed, until now, when, through the one who has ever been the brightness and music of our home—as, indeed, I told Mr. Jones this evening—the prospect before us has grown bright indeed. Mabel, my dear, Heaven bless you. May you be the happy woman you deserve to be."

"Papa, have you had—money from Mr. Jones—before—to-night?"

Mrs. Clutterbuck, who had been sitting with her face hidden in her hands, looked up at this, looked up with drowned eyes and working mouth.

"Have I had any temporary loans from Mr. Jones before to-night?" repeated the Major, with a nonchalant air, and the look as of one who tries to tax his memory and bring it up to the scratch. "Yes, once or twice; bagatelles, though, mere bagatelles; sums of which no one would think twice; conveniences to me, no doubt, at the time; but to a man who counts his income by thousands, trifles light as air—mere ripples on the pecuniary surface. I very much question—I do, indeed, if Mr. Jones even remembers the transactions in question at all."

An indescribable hopelessness was expressed by Mrs. Clutterbuck's whole figure as these sentences passed her husband's lips. Only Mabel remained unchanged—like some effigy carved in marble, like the Snow Maiden of the fairy legend. There was something in this absolute calm, this strong composure, that gave the Major the fidgets. He distrusted what he could not understand.

Better, he reflected, to prove the matter to the uttermost.

"As to love," he said, flicking one finger lightly on the palm of the other hand, "love is a word for girls and boys." A shiver passed over the crouching woman

at his side; but he was not conscious of it, he continued unruffled: "Romance is all very well, my dear girl; but, as they say of certain fabrics—it will not always wash. Now I want to put things very plainly before you. Life has given you a grand chance—a noble opportunity. If, in seizing this chance, you have to set aside some little budding fancy—some nascent romance—you will not, my precious child, shrink from whatever little passing pain that renunciation may cause you, I am sure. We can none of us, my dear, live for ourselves alone. I do not live for myself alone. I make all these efforts, try all these experiments, for the sake of others—for the sake of my family. Hitherto they have not been crowned with success; now I see the light breaking ahead. I have a dutiful and loving child—Heaven can bestow no brighter gift. I am willing to owe all to that child—to let my little ones reap the benefit of her devotion. I can say no more; indeed, there is no more to say."

And the Major went into his own little room, his hand unconsciously patting his breast-pocket.

When the two women were left alone, they drew near to one another, and Mabel, bending down, kissed her mother's hand.

So may Ruth have kissed the hand of Naomi.

But, for the rest, Mabel differed from the young Moabite, for of words uttered she none.

Clinging closely together they heard the Major call for lights; heard the step of the soldier-servant along the stone corridor; and then Mabel, moving as one who walks in sleep and follows the leading of a dream, crept up the stairs and so into the room where stood the range of little beds, side by side. We have been there before, and seen Mr. Jones standing by little Phil, coveting such a treasure of his own.

Again the moonlight filled the place, and touched the golden heads; again tender eyes watched the sleeping lads; but with a difference, for Mabel's slender figure all in white had little resemblance to the sturdy presence of the ship-owner of Seething Lane.

Bertie was fast asleep, his head pillowed on his arm. He would look like that, thought Mabel, when he was gone from her into the little world of a great school.

He would always be the same pure, gentle-hearted fellow wherever his lot was cast. She kissed him as she passed; but he never stirred. His sleep, like his nature, was calm and restful. Algie had tossed all the clothes off, and lay there in the moonlight like a sleeping Cupid. His sister's tender hands covered the little rosy limbs anew. Then there was Phil, the household king, his sceptre laid aside, his rule relaxed in the languor of slumber.

Oh, little golden head upon the snowy pillow, what do you know of the sacrifice about to be made for your welfare in a day to come, as sister bends above you—you, her "heart's darling," her dear delight? A hot, bright tear drops upon your tangled locks, and glistens there like dew.

But Jim!

Does Jim sleep like a little wicked serpent—with one eye open?

He is sitting up in his bed in a moment, he has his arms round sister's neck, and is wiping away her tears with his bony hand.

"Jim," she says—and oh! what a sad, sad voice she speaks in—"dear Jim, I want to tell you something. You must never tell that secret, never, to any one. Jim, I can always trust your promise. Promise me you will never tell it, because— Hold me tight, Jim; kiss me a lot, dear; I want it badly. It will never come true."

"Do you mean about Captain Rowan?" said Jim, greatly awed, and holding her off to look at her.

"Yes, I mean about Captain Rowan."

"He won't take us? He thinks we are too many? I do call that mean," said Jim, getting quite red in the face. "And I don't know any one that will do as well, do you?"

"No one—no one——"

"He is always so kind, isn't he? Do you remember when the white hen broke her leg, how he fetched Dr. Halkett to set it, and how it grewed quite beautiful, like the other?"

No reply; only Mabel's head is buried in the bosom of his white night-shirt, and she shakes, so that he has to hold her very tight to keep her.

"And he is such a splen-did bowler. I should have learnt to bat fine; I know I should. But we can't help it; if he won't take us he won't. I say, Mabel dear, don't cry like that. I don't mind, if you don't."

And to show that he didn't mind, Jim cried, too.

"We must comfit one another," said Jim. "Put your head down on my pillow, and I'll comfit you, Mabel, dear. But you mustn't sob so loud, or the others will wake, and want to know about our secret. And we can't tell them that, can we?"

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